

**Chancellor's Community Forum**  
**5 Year Plan**  
**October 29, 2008**  
**Francis EC**  
**6:30-8:00PM**  
**Lisa M. Ruda**

*The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.*

**Overview:** Generally participants were comfortable with the 5-Year plan, but there were many questions about specific changes that have either already taken place or are underway. Specifically, people wanted to know about the Twilight program and outreach initiatives for older youth, the teacher contract negotiations, parental involvement initiatives (including strengthening LSRTs and PTAs), and food services.

**Keywords:** Capital Gains, Twilight program, alternative programs, 5 Year Plan, professional development, Individual Graduation Plans, data, college preparation, food services, language program, language immersion programs, Comprehensive Staffing Model, student achievement data, DC CAS, after-school, literacy coaches

**Presenter/Moderator:** Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management;  
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

**Panelists:** Lisa M. Ruda, Chief of Staff, DCPS  
Eric Lerum, Chief of Staff, Deputy Mayor for Education

**Codes:**

MR= Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

LMR = Lisa M. Ruda, Chief of Staff, DCPS

EL = Eric Lerum, Chief of Staff, Deputy Mayor for Education

**Notes:**

**LMR:** Introduced herself and opened up the discussion by having each member introduce themselves to the group.

**CM:** *Why were so many teachers laid off this year and does DCPS plan to set expectations for teachers to reward students for doing good as opposed to only punishing them for doing bad?*

**LMR:** DCPS has not laid off many teachers, but NCLB required us to ensure that instructional staff is highly-qualified. Behavioral Intervention Strategies are definitely a part of the long-term plan and not just for special education students, but across the

board. Also, there has been a lot of press on the **Capital Gains** program. This is an example of students being rewarded for their engagement and success in school.

**CM:** As a representative from a non-profit with a focus on enabling parents to become self-advocates, it is very difficult to find information to share with parents. DCPS should map out all of its partners that they are currently working with. It is very difficult to get accurate information on basic processes. DCPS should not expect that parents can keep up with the press releases and communication through the central office website. *How can we ensure that parents are equipped to be advocates?*

**MR:** Gave an example about how parents at schools that were slated for closure were very upset that their school was closing and said they were happy with their school. The reality in many of these instances was that these schools were not achieving. DCPS wants to share accurate information on where kids are and what they are learning in schools. We want to shift dynamics so that reform is not dependent on the Chancellor or the Superintendent in power, but rather on the parents coming from the ground up. We ultimately want parents to be armed with the information they need to demand what they need for their schools.

**LMR:** *What about the plan; do people agree with or find inspiring?*

**CM:** Was most impressed by the notion of meeting kids from where they are and felt that this was the most compelling part of the plan because it targets kids who need the most help. There has been great difficulty doing this in other school districts, particularly, Chicago.

**LMR:** We are committed to making a huge investment in these kids because they definitely fit somewhere, but the way we have been operating in the past has not been working. It is important that we deal with kids struggling in general education because it ultimately grows into a special education issue. The **Twilight program** at Ballou SHS has created an **alternative learning environment** to work to re-engage students who are over-age and struggling with the current day school set-up. These students start their day later and end their day later and are offered more differentiated instruction in smaller class settings. It is an expensive effort, but it offers students a “fresh chance.” We would rather channel resources on the front end.

**CM:** *Is the issue of large numbers of disengaged youth a function of behavioral issues or social adjustment issues?*

**LMR:** There are a large number of factors that play a role in what causes a student to become disengaged. But many times, special education issues that go unnoticed can eventually manifest into behavioral issues.

**CM:** *What specific data is there to show that **Twilight Programs** are working in DC? Also, what specific data is there to show that offering Physical Education, Art, and Music in all schools is effective?*

**LMR:** There is no specific **data** on **Twilight Programs** in DC because these programs are still new. **Qualitative data** has been collected and shows that the students and administrators involved feel that it is working so far. We can provide information on its success in other school districts. The **5-Year Plan** does not provide any specific performance targets, but the **Performance Plan** does have more specific information. We will be working to get more specific data as we work through **the 5-Year Plan** and determine what factors will be evaluated.

**LMR:** *What is missing from the 5-year plan? Is there anything that we should emphasize more or less?*

**CM:** *Will there be **language programs** guaranteed in all schools as part of the 5-Year Plan?*

**LMR:** We have a number of **language immersion programs** already in place in a number of schools. The **comprehensive staffing model** as it currently stands does not specify language programs. However, individual schools are given the flexibility they need in order to make decisions regarding what is best for the needs of their own school communities.

**CM:** *Does the **Twilight Program** allow for kids to eventually exit the program?*

**LMR:** We do not have a firm answer yet on DC because the program is so new, but in lots of other districts with these programs, students are able to come out, but usually, participants opt to stay in the program because it offers them a “clean slate.”

**CM:** As a representative of a non-profit that targets kids having academic trouble, it is tough to get individual **student data** (i.e. last year only a handful of kids submitted report cards). It would be good if parents had better access to student grades. The website is helpful, but it is hard to find things such as school profiles and **school achievement data**. *Does DCPS have any plans to make obtaining access to student grades, transcripts, and **school achievement data** more accessible?*

**LMR:** There may be some privacy issues around releasing student grades and information. The website is the best avenue for getting **school achievement data (DC-CAS data)** and we are working on improving the website so that it will have accurate and up-to-date school profiles. We are working through a number of **data** issues to improve student access and awareness of grades and transcripts on the high school level.

**CM:** *What is the process for developing a LSRT and why is this information not readily accessible on the website?*

**LMR:** These decisions are made on a school level and we can follow-up with this information.

**CM:** From working in Minneapolis, MN schools we saw that disenfranchised populations miss out on important information. Localized informational forums need to be held in Ward 7 and 8 specifically. I support what is going on in DC currently but think you could do more. *Why do we not use **after-school** coordinators used to provide more information to parents? How are we monitoring the job that they are doing? Are they really capable to do their jobs?*

**LMR:** We hired 106 **after-school** coordinators this year, some of whom have proven to be stellar and some who are just alright so far. All employees at schools have generally good intentions, but we need to make sure we measure the right things to guide their performance. We need to assess our parents to understand the best ways to communicate information. In her previous school district, the majority of families did not have regular access to computers. Their most effective strategy was going to recreation centers, churches, and school on many evenings and Saturdays to get the word out about major policy issues.

**CM:** *To what extent does DCPS follow the lead of New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein?*

**LMR:** We are working with them quite a bit, but there are some stark differences. Mainly, New York City's school district is massive in size. They have divided schools into smaller clusters and perhaps DCPS can learn more from them as to how to reach parents so that we can implement similar strategies here in DC.

**LMR:** *Regarding our priorities, what in the 5-Year Plan is inspiring? What is missing? After one year, is there anything that we should have made a bigger priority?*

**CM:** There has been a lot in the news about reforming teacher compensation lately. *What will that pay structure look like?*

**LMR:** We will share the information shared with teachers at the presentations at McKinley Tech SHS.

**CM:** *Have there been any changes in terms of what kinds of **professional development** opportunities are available to teachers?*

**LMR:** This year we have **literacy coaches** in all of our elementary and K-8<sup>th</sup> grade schools who are expected to provide assistance to teachers in literacy training and effective instruction. Some have been incredibly successful and others are still getting acclimated. We expect to see improvement in our reading scores across the District. We are also trying to better coordinate and align our **professional development** offerings. We now have a comprehensive **professional development** calendar that is sent to every teacher. We are also much more mindful of what times teachers are available to attend these and are making them more accessible to staff.

**CM:** *What exactly are “Parent Advisory Committees”?*

**LMR:** What we are looking for is a panel of actual parents with kids currently attending DC Public Schools. They will meet with the Chancellor on a monthly basis to discuss policy. We want to identify what makes a strong, effective parent and figure out how to ensure that parents can be advocates for their children and respective school communities. This is mirrored after the Student Advisory Council. For instance, one of the things the Student Advisory Council was really concerned about was the quality of **food services**. This year, we decided to go with a completely different **food services** vendor.

**CM:** *How is **food services** different this year as opposed to last?*

**LMR:** We have outsourced our **food services** operations to folks who are more equipped to handle the nuts and bolts involved. Last year, we were being delivered pre-packaged meals that we were literally heated up, which made for really lousy food. We now have cafeteria workers who report to the vendor and are able to be trained by them directly. We are also now renovating cafeterias in a number of our schools so that they are better equipped to prepare fresh foods on site and create a more attractive environment for students. We have done this at Sousa, Anacostia, Ellington, and Woodson so far.

**CM:** Through working at Ballou, many kids have been complaining that there are too few people working in the cafeteria, meaning the lines are always long and they cannot get their food with enough time to eat.

**LMR:** We can definitely follow-up on this matter, but this is a good problem to have. This year, many more children are choosing to eat our cafeteria food. We just have to adjust to meet this new demand.

**CM:** *Is **college preparation** and taking the SAT mandatory for all students?*

**LMR:** Really, **college preparation** information is supposed to be coming from school counselors, but for a number of reasons this has not always worked. We conducted a major transcript audit over the summer and found that we need to clean up much of our **data** to ensure its accuracy. We have now introduced **Individual Graduation Plans** and are working to make it easier for students to access their own academic records.

**CM:** The Washington Teacher’s Union feels that the Chancellor is doing a good job, but teachers are tired of hearing that the system is “broken” because many of our teachers are working tirelessly to improve the status quo. Teachers want to see more “collaboration” and less “cooperation.” This is needed in many ways including **professional development** opportunities. LSRT’s are not being used effectively in all schools, but interested parents and community members can look to the union to get additional information as well. The current teacher contract is a good start for collaboration and a beginning document for reform. Also, the **5-Year plan** can better

address the chronic behavioral issues that are occurring in many of our schools. Every school should have a behavioral plan in place. To date, this has not been done. Teachers and administrators need to make better use of the collaborative planning time that is allotted every morning. He is tired of people looking at the union as negative.

**LMR:** Closed the discussion and told folks they can log their feedback on the website or can see note taker for more information.

**CM:** Feels overall the **5-Year plan** is comprehensive and effective. Would like to see where it is going to go moving forward, but thinks this is a great start.